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15 (I)

Interrogation of Major ERNST HERTZER of German Army Signals Intelligence Service

Attached is the report of the interrogation of Major ERNST HERTZER, Kommandeur der Nachr. Aufkl. 1 (Army Group N. UKRAINE), formerly head of Nachr. Aufkl. Auswertestelle 7 (Italy).

The interrogation was carried out on 18th June, 1945, at REVIN, France, by Dr. Pickering and Lieut. Col. Pritchard.

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1. Major HERTZER is a regular officer. He makes up by bark and monotonous loudness what he lacks in stature and bulk. He gives the impression of great efficiency. It is reported that HERTZER is a fanatical Nazi - so eager to denounce his men for wavering sympathies that his accusations were in the end non longer heeded by the Party. Interrogators did not take him up on these points; it was fairly clearly a true report. Of his efficiency as an organiser there can be little doubt.

2. Interrogators concentrated on HERTZER's career prior to his appointment as Kommandeur der NA 1 in the summer of 1944. HERTZER was in command of an intercept unit in the Spanish campaign. In the beginning all signals of the "REDS" were readable. To the end never less tham 90% were read. During the POLISH campaign HERTZER was in charge of evaluation, specifically of fusion (Endauswertung) of POLISH Army signals. POLISH Army signals security was good for the first few days. Then there was a complete collapse of communications. HERTZER's unit covered the Russian advance into POLAND and FINLAND;. the keys used were compromised. There was little FINNISH traffic to be covered. In November 1940 HERTZER left the intercept service for a time. He knows that "in those days" Army traffic in BRITAIN consisted entirely of plain language signals.

3. From the spring of 1943 Major HERTZER was head of Nachr. Aufk. Ausw. Stelle 7 (ITALY). He gave details of the units belonging to Kommandeur 7. The only point of interest: Fixed Station 1 (ERIKA) was formed from a platoon provided by Kommandeur 4. It went from GREECE to MARSALA, SICILY. HERTZER maintains that a Sigs Recce Abt had not been detailed for Kommandeur 7 by the time he left ITALY. He had heard of Hptm. KEMPER but did not know that Hptm. KEMPER commanded Sigs Recce Abt 15 under Kommandeur 7. (Comment: this is a difficult point. Abt. 15 was functioning in ITALY by March '44. HERTZER's appointment to NA 1 was not until June.) When interrogator informed HERTZER of Oberst BOETZEL's opinion "the Abteilungen did not prove their worth" HERTZER said: I would not say that. They were in a way superfluous, but once established, thay could be made to fulfil a function. They were designed to coordinate forward interception and see that the Armies were served with what they needed. The appointment could be given to an elderly Hauptmann whose task could be continously to do the rounds of the forward intercept units and the Army, Corps and Divisions in the sector (comparing notes, hearing suggestions, switching intercept Trupps from one Division to another). On a front like that of 8th Army HERTZER would imagine an Abt. Kdr. very useful: continuous switching of Schwerpunkts - language difficulties etc.

4. Cryptography. HERTZER said Obltn. MUELLER, chief cryptographer of Evaluation Section 7, was a man of exceptional ability. HERTZER ascribed successes largely to capture. A great deal was captured. In the NETTUNO bridgehead a Battalion Cdr. of 45 U.S. Infantry Division was captured with all the Division's keys on him, all the callsigns for the month for working with left and right neighbours and with rear. Transport networks were productive. HERTZER remembers a 13th Transport Company which was particularly insecure. HERTZER remembers CPX as an indication of practice traffic. HERTZER remembers "9 U.S. Armored Division" in the NETTUNO bridgehead. Comment: It was difficult to get HERTZER to reflect on any subject. He could not be shaken in his conviction that "9 U.S. Armoured Division" was in the bridgehead.

5. Allied bomb-lines were at first encoded by grid references only. Later bomb lines were encoded, and breaking depended on identification of the bomb-line signal. The French Hagelin "C 36" was read in its entirety. 8th Indian Division was identified in ITALY whilst still unloading at BARI. (No, probably not by its own signals but by references in nets of neighbours. "It is amazing how fruitful such references can be; we once puzzled for days to establish who the "curly-headed boys" were, to which one signal had referred. It was typical of HERTZER's faculty for remembering only the anecdotal aspects of the intercept story that he couldn't recall who the "curly-heads" turned out to be.)

6. HERTZER said the Germans, after the ITALIAN capitulation made strenuous efforts, but failed, to locate the Italian HOLLERITH section in

ROME.

7. After the retirement of Oberst MUEGGE ((in October 1943)) from the post of Kommandeur 7, HERTZER was acting Kommandeur (he was 'ernannt' but not appointed). Then an Oberstltn. WOLLMANN was Kommandeur for 8 days, but died. Some unspecified "row" in BERLIN at OKH. stood in the way of HERTZER's appointment. He finally succeeded Obstltn. BARCHEWITZ as Kommandeur 1. Interrogator mentioned a rumour that the Germans had sent Hptm. OPITZ (HERTZER's successor as head of Evaluation 7, Italy) to JAPAN. HERTZER pooh-pooed the idea. He pretended to reflect and came out with an amazing yarn (about "volunteers for a special undertaking") which lead nowhere.

8. It was impossible to keep HERTZER on a narrow track. Interrogators were convinced that his knowledge was general only, and not in any points of detail a reliable guide to the cryptographical success of his unit. He had known of some codes by their German designations only: he could no longer remember them - (except French C 37). As a last effort to turn him to a story of which he might know something in detail we tried the subject of German foreknowledge of Allied landings in the MEDITERRANEAN area, SICILY, NETTUNO, ANZIO. HERTZER's reaction was to "put on a good show". He ended by claiming that platoon "DORIS" had existed on paper before, and in anticipation of, the ANZIO landings. (This is known to be quite untrue). However, - the clue to the SICILIAN landings was "a general test landing on an island N. of BIZERTA" which developed a previously unfamiliar traffic, finally interpreted as that of artillery shore observers. Then came PANTELLERIA with the same phenomenon! Movements of troops to harbours were picked up (BIZERTA, TUNIS, CONSTANTINE). Such signals as "Closing down, going on board", gave the show away.

9. As regards the SALERNO landing the "BADOGLIO insurrection" so upset military existence in the FRASCATI area that for 14 days there was no interception. (Kommandeur 7 got his unit motorised after that.) Nevertheless the Intercept Service was able to give warning of the landings.

10. Air reconnaissance of the ANZIO area was far too intensive and the fact that no reconnaissance was flown North of the TIBER was also revealing. The landing was therefore "more or less expected". Again there was the "komisch" wireless traffic of the artillery shore observers.

11. Comment. There is no reason for the German intercept service in ITALY to belittle its success in the MEDITERRANEAN. HERTZER has obviously only the vaguest recollection of the details. Final impression: HERTZER was an efficient business manager. His appointment as Kommandeur 1 shows he was considered rather the Kommandeur rather than the Intelligence Officer type.